Manitoba Family Services and Housing

Update on the Office of the Children's Advocate

Shelter System Review Report

Progress Report on

Recommendations for the

Emergency Shelter System

February 2005

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Manitoba Family Services and Housing

Update on the Office of the Children's Advocate Shelter System Review Report

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In December 2002, the then Minister of Family Services and Housing requested that the Office of the Children's Advocate conduct an operational review of Winnipeg Child and Family Services' emergency shelter system. This request was made to address concerns about quality of care in the shelters.

In April 2004, the Children's Advocate provided the Minister with a report and 77 recommendations for improvements to the emergency shelter system. As part of the department's response and action plan the Shelter Review Implementation Committee was established to guide future planning, governance and resource development of the emergency system. The Committee is co-chaired by Joy Cramer, Executive Director, Child Protection Branch, Manitoba Family Services and Housing and Dr. Denis Bracken, Associate Professor, University of Manitoba, Faculty of Social Work and includes the Chief Executive Officers (or designates) of the First Nations of Northern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority, the First Nations of Southern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority, the Metis Child and Family Services Authority, the General Child and Family Services Authority and two other representatives from Family Services and Housing.

This committee reviewed all the recommendations and has been working with partners in the child welfare system to address the report. Highlights of recent progress to further ensure high quality of care for children include:

- creating new emergency care foster beds;
- adding a new Provincial Abuse Investigator, there are now two in total;
- hiring one new Licensing staff in Child Protection Branch, there are now two in total;
- reducing 24-hour staff shifts in emergency shelters; and
- training for shelter staff.

The Minister requested the department respond to the Advocate's recommendations and the following four strategies provide further details on progress to date:

ACTION PLAN STRATEGY 1: Develop New Emergency Care Resources

The Advocate recommended that unless there were compelling reasons to do so, no child under the age of eight should be placed in a shift-staffed group facility. The department immediately began the process to create 50 new emergency care foster beds for children under age eight.

Progress:

The initial task was to choose and select a service provider(s) for the 50 new beds. A Request for Proposals (RFP) was distributed and four proposals were received and considered. B & L Homes was selected to recruit, train and support foster parents for 35 new bed spaces and provide ongoing services to children placed in

those spaces. Community Led Organizations United Together (CLOUT), a group of community-based organizations including Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre Inc., Native Women's Transition Centre, Community Education Development Association, Andrews Street Family Centre, North End Women's Centre, Ndinawemaaganag Endaawad, Rossbrook House and Wolsely Family Place was selected to provide services for the remaining 15 bed spaces.

B & L and Community Led Organizations United Together have worked cooperatively in satisfying government's financial and program accountability requirements, including signing Service Purchase Agreements (SPAs). B & L has made 20 beds available and continues to make progress on the remaining 15 beds. The 15 beds with Community Led Organizations United Together have been opened.

It is anticipated that all 50 beds will be in place by the end of March 2005.

ACTION PLAN STRATEGY 2:
Build a New Emergency Care System for Children

The Advocate's report made recommendations on planning for future development of the shelter system. The department's action plan calls for the creation of a new emergency care system for children, building on key components of the existing system, to be done in a systematic and organized manner. The plan identified five steps:

Step 1: Complete a province-wide assessment of residential care needs for children.

Step 2: Based on the results of the assessment, develop a proposed continuum of care and classification system for children's residential care.

Step 3: Develop a vision statement and comprehensive program model for the role of emergency placement facilities and services.

Step 4: Given the proposed program model, recommend standards and training strategy to ensure staff have the qualifications and competence to adequately meet the needs of children in emergency care.

Step 5: Assess the feasibility of implementing the Advocate's recommendations regarding a centralized office to oversee future resource developments, reconfigure the provincial placement desk, external governance of placement resources for children and a strategy for foster parent recruitment.

Progress:

The Advocate's report contained many recommendations on planning for future development of the shelter system. Under the direction of the Shelter Review Implementation Committee, an evidence-based, province-wide assessment of out-of-home placement needs for children has been undertaken by the Policy and Planning Branch of Family Services and Housing. The First Nations Research Site has been hired to conduct the literature review.

An analysis, that incorporates the results and conclusions of both reports, will be done. The committee will review the findings and incorporate them into recommendations for a proposed continuum of care.

The committee has reviewed the Advocate's 77 recommendations and partnerships have been formed within the child welfare system to address the recommendations. These partners include the four Authorities, Child Protection Branch and Winnipeg Child and Family Services. The committee will follow-up on the progress of the work and ensure that a coordinated response is included in the detailed implementation plan to be submitted to the Minister.

ACTION PLAN STRATEGY 3:
Immediately Improve the Quality of Care in the Shelter System

The Advocate stated that a key element of delivering high quality care for children was an appropriate staffing model and supervision in the shelter system.

Progress:

Shelters within Winnipeg Child and Family Services are shift-staffed. In the report, the Advocate noted that a number of staff were working 24-hour shifts and that this was having a negative impact on their ability to delivery high quality care to children. Winnipeg Child and Family Services continues to move toward reducing and, eventually eliminating, 24 hour shifts in the existing shelter system. In addition, staff with extensive experience in residential care are now assigned responsibility to support shelter coordinators. Shelter coordinators are taking a competency-based training program and training opportunities for other shelter staff continue to be explored.

ACTION PLAN STRATEGY 4:
Strengthen System Oversight

The Advocate made several recommendations to improve monitoring of care.

Progress:

As part of its larger task, the committee will ensure that development of program standards and licensing requirements for emergency shelter care reflect best practices.

Family Services and Housing has moved to further ensure high quality of care for children by increasing the Provincial Abuse Investigator staffing level from one to two and adding one additional licensing staff in the Child Protection Branch, bringing the number of licensing staff to two.

A working group with representatives of the Authorities and Child Protection Branch has met regularly to discuss the role, mandate and membership of the Provincial Placement Desk, in order to develop options related to the placement desk's role and compatibility in the restructured child welfare system.

Family Services and Housing has also initiated discussions with other service providers, additional government departments and organizations such as the Youth Emergency Crisis Stabilization Service, Winnipeg Police Services and the Manitoba Foster Family Network to ensure resources are used efficiently and effectively.